

## SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Year C: Acts 7:55-60; Ps 97; Rev 22:12-14, 16-17, 20; Jn 17:20-26

May 29, 2022

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On this Seventh Sunday of Easter, we find ourselves in the days between the Lord's Ascension into Heaven and the promised coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, which we celebrate next Sunday. In these days between the Ascension and Pentecost, we can imagine what it was like for the first disciples to adjust to not having Christ present with them here on earth.

The disciples must have missed seeing Christ and wondered how He would still be able to help them and guide them, if He was no longer present with them here on earth. Before He left them, He had told them, “[B]ehold, I am with you always, until the end of the age” (Mt 28:20). But now they had to learn how He could still be with them, even after He left them and ascended into Heaven. And the disciples must have been wondering what would happen next. They knew Jesus had promised to send them another Advocate, the Spirit of truth (Jn 14:16-17), but they did not yet know Who this was or what His coming would mean for them.

After the Ascension, the disciples were learning what it's like for all of *us*, who live centuries later and did not see or witness Christ in the Incarnation, but yet still believe in Him and believe He is present to us from His place in Heaven. The disciples had to learn how Christ was still able to guide them and assist them, even though He was no longer living here among. They had to learn how to call on Him in their prayers and become convinced of His abiding presence among them, even though He was now in Heaven.

In the first reading, we heard the account of the martyrdom of St. Stephen, who was given a glimpse of Christ in Heaven to sustain him at the moment of his greatest trial. As he was being accused of blasphemy for preaching about Christ, Stephen “*looked up intently to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and Stephen said, ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.’*” As Stephen was about to die, Christ allowed Stephen to see Him in Heaven, so that his faith would stay strong, and so that he could announce this vision to the others, to sustain their faith that Christ was still present to them.

In the Gospel, we heard part of the great prayer that Christ offered to His Father on the night before He died. He was praying for His disciples, and He said, “*Father, they are your gift to me. I wish that where I am they also may be with me, that they may see my glory that you gave me, because you loved me before the foundation of the world.*” The disciples knew that Jesus wanted each of them eventually to come live with Him in Heaven, and they had to learn that from His place in Heaven He was still acting and intervening in their lives to *bring* them to Heaven.

This is the same challenge of faith for all of us – to believe that Jesus still abides here with us, even though He is reigning in Heaven, and that His presence will remain with us even until the end of the world, as He promised. When Christ ascended into Heaven, He did not abandon the world that He had just redeemed, and He did not distance Himself from our lowly state or leave us orphaned, without His care and protection. As He told His disciples, “*I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you*” (Jn 14:18). The virtue of faith requires us to believe without seeing (cf. Heb 11:1), and to be convinced that Christ can still be present to us spiritually, even though He lives bodily now in Heaven.

This assurance that Jesus abides with us is much stronger for those who are honest and earnest about keeping the commandments of God. Jesus told His disciples, “*Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him*” (Jn 14:23). God promises to dwell in the souls of those who follow His commandments and live as He taught. If we want to have the assurance that God abides with us, we need to do our part by ordering and living our lives according to the commandments of God. Then we can turn to God in our prayers with the assurance that He abides with us here on earth, even from His place in Heaven. And that gives us the great hope that where Christ is we also may be one day, so that we will see the glory of God with our own eyes.